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Research Report 1511

Family Factors Affecting Retention: A Review of the Literature

Rose M. Etheridge
Research Triangle Institute



March 1989

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relationship between retention and satisfaction with specific family programs, policies, and other aspects of military life is less clear.

Other features of military life have different effects on different families.

(1) Travel, relocation, and family separation are a source of stress and dissatisfaction for some families. For others they are viewed as neutral or even positive.

(2) Family separation and relocation have a stronger effect on retention than location. However, location of choice can be a positive retention bonus.

(3) The magnitude of the effects of such factors as pay, retirement, benefits, deployments, family separations, working hours, job satisfaction, and marital satisfaction all depend on which stage of the "family life cycle" and "career life cycle" that the soldier is in.

(4) Female members of dual military couples are more likely than males to leave service. The reasons for this difference appear to center on the difficulties these couples have in balancing work and family demands.

^v The review shows that little is known about the process used by families to make actual retention decisions. Such information should be useful to policy makers and program managers who would like to influence that decision to benefit the Army. The review also showed the need for multivariate and other more sophisticated research designs for testing the relative influence of key family variables in the stay-leave decision.

Family Factors Affecting Retention: A Review of the Literature

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FOREWORD

The Army Family Research Program (AFRP) is a 5-year integrated research program started in November 1986 in response to research mandated by both the 1983 CSA White Paper on the Army Family and the subsequent CSA Army Family Action Plans (1984-1988). The objective of the research is to support the Army Family Action Plan through research products that will (1) determine the demographic characteristics of Army families, (2) identify positive motivators and negative detractors to soldiers remaining in the Army, (3) develop pilot programs to improve family adaptation to Army life, and (4) increase operational readiness.

The Army sponsor for this effort, the Army Community and Family Support Center (CFSC), reviewed and approved an earlier draft of this report. This review of relevant findings linking family factors to soldier retention will be useful in formulating and revising Army programs and policies.



EDGAR M. JOHNSON
Technical Director

FAMILY FACTORS AFFECTING RETENTION: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Requirement:

The Army Family Research Program (AFRP) was mandated by both the 1983 CSA White Paper on the Army Family and the subsequent CSA Army Family Action Plans (1984-1988). A major part of the mandate was to show how family factors affected soldier retention.

Procedure:

The source materials for this review were both published and unpublished reports on military retention completed during the last 15 years. The information was also supplemented by small group discussions with soldiers and their spouses during field visits during calendar year 1987. Although the review focuses on military samples, findings from relevant civilian literature are incorporated when appropriate.

Findings:

The research linking family factors to soldier retention is in its infancy. Most of the existing literature has serious methodological shortcomings (e.g., it employs small, nonrandom samples, and simple descriptive or bivariate statistics). Therefore, it does not adequately represent the true complexity of family influences on retention. The review also shows that little is known about what the process that families use in reaching retention decisions is.

The reports reviewed show a consistent relationship between spouse support for the military career and both career intent and actual retention behavior. The more positive and supportive the spouse, the greater the likelihood of the soldier's remaining.

The soldier's satisfaction with the military as a good place to raise a family, his/her degree of organizational commitment, and the soldier's satisfaction with military life are also related to retention.

Awareness of the existence of community programs (even when they are not used) increases satisfaction with military life and enhances retention. However, the relationship between retention and satisfaction with specific family programs, policies, and other aspects of military life is less clear.

Other features of military life have different effects on different families.

(1) Travel, relocation, and family separation are a source of stress and dissatisfaction for some families. For others they are viewed as neutral or even positive.

(2) Family separation and relocation have a stronger effect on retention than location. However, location of choice can be a positive retention bonus.

(3) The magnitude of the effects of such factors as pay, retirement, benefits, deployments, family separations, working hours, job satisfaction, and marital satisfaction all depend on which stage of the "family life cycle" and "career life cycle" the soldier is in.

(4) Female members of dual military couples are more likely than males to leave the service. The reasons for this difference appear to center on the difficulties these couples have in balancing work and family demands.

Utilization of Findings:

The U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center (CFSC) reviewed and approved an earlier draft of this report. CFSC comments indicate that this review of relevant findings linking family factors to soldier retention will be useful in formulating and revising Army programs and policies.

FAMILY FACTORS AFFECTING RETENTION: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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FAMILY FACTORS AFFECTING RETENTION:
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Both the nature of the Army family and its relationship to the Army has changed dramatically since the Army came into being over 200 years ago. During the American Revolutionary War, there was no provision for families unless they functioned as support "troops" and helped with the cooking, mending, and hauling of supplies (Bell & Iadeluca, 1987).

Pensions for disabled soldiers and death benefits did not appear until 1794 for officers and 1804 for enlisted. Family housing did not come until 1812 and that was only for officers. Family allowances were not paid until World War I and most of the family agencies that we think of today (e.g., Army Emergency Relief (AER), United Service Organization (USO), and the family services portion of the American Red Cross) did not arrive until World War II (Bell & Iadeluca, 1987).

Despite the Army's efforts to restrict the presence of families (particularly for enlisted soldiers), the demands of a large peacetime Army resulted in large numbers of "dependents" and therefore family problems. This work load, in turn, lead to the founding of the Army Community Service (ACS) in 1965. The advent of the All Volunteer Force (AVF) in 1973 resulted in the introduction of more women soldiers and dual military couples (Bell & Iadeluca, 1987).

The 1980s brought a large influx of Army wives back into the labor force and a series of grassroots pressure for the Army to revamp its family "system" and the services it provides. Part of this latter movement resulted in a mandate for research into how families contribute to soldier retention and readiness as a means of building better services and providing more financial backing for those that exist. This report is the first step in the research thrust into the family-soldier retention link: an exploration of what is already known.

Philosophically, the Army's commitment to families is two-pronged. On the one hand, the Army acknowledges its moral obligation to provide the kinds of goods and services that ensure a satisfactory standard of living and quality of life for members and their families in exchange for members' oaths to serve their country--and even give their lives if necessary. Secondly, the Army recognizes that there is an interdependence between the military and the family. Families can influence the adequacy with which the Army accomplishes its mission through their effect on the quality of soldiers' performances and through their influence on soldiers' commitments to stay or to leave the military.

Although the Army is committed to supporting families, available resources are limited. The Army must establish priorities in order to distribute funds most effectively across all areas of the defense system--from staffing, force modernization, and technology development to pay, benefits, and family support

programs. Planners and decision-makers must ask difficult practices and policies questions, such as: 1) What types of benefits, programs, are most effective with families? 2) Which interventions have the greatest impact on family adaptation, readiness, and retention? 3) What level of funding is sufficient to produce acceptable levels of family adaptation, readiness, and retention? 4) If it becomes necessary to do so, which family support interventions can be sacrificed and at what cost to the Army? 5) What type and level of expenditure constitutes the best return on the investment?

Among several Army family program activities underway to assist in answering these questions is the Army Family Research Program (AFRP) sponsored by the Community and Family Support Center (CFSC) and administered by the Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI). A goal of this research is to formulate programs, policies, and practices that improve the retention of qualified personnel.

This report presents a summary of the state of knowledge about the impact of family factors on retention and draws from findings presented in a variety of books, articles, and technical reports, both published and unpublished. The summary is supplemented by information gathered from small group discussions with soldiers and spouses at two CONUS and two USAREUR locations. Although the review has a military focus, findings from the civilian literature are incorporated where military research is lacking and in those areas where civilian organizational dynamics can be considered reasonably close to those operating in the military.

The report explores the family factors identified in the literature that influence retention and examines the magnitude of the effects and the relationship of factors. The discussion of findings is organized by topic. Within each topic, findings are critiqued with the current state of knowledge about the topic under the heading of "Research Findings." Gaps in knowledge about the topic and areas requiring further research are presented under the heading of "Research Issues." The report concludes with a discussion of research directions suggested by research findings to date, and the policy implications and outcomes expected from planned research efforts.

Family Factors Predictive of Retention

Historically, research on retention has reflected the Army's focus on the individual soldier. As Army leadership has begun to recognize that career and reenlistment decisions are often family decisions, research incorporating family factors have followed. Still, research investigating the family-retention relationship is in the early stages of development. Much of this research is anecdotal or descriptive, while research employing more rigorous designs typically include a restricted range of family variables. These limitations leave few firm findings that can be reported without extensive qualification.

A further limitation in the family-retention research is the failure to address the process by which retention decision making operates for soldiers at different points in the family life cycle and soldier career cycle—that is, the kinds of information that influence the decision, the timing of the

decision, and the mechanism by which the soldier uses the information to make a retention decision. Clearly, a large gap exists in the current state of knowledge about family effects on career and reenlistment decision making. The following is a summary and critique of findings-to-date and suggested next steps for expanding the current state of knowledge in this most important area.

Spouse Support: Research Findings

In a recent review of the literature on family factor effects on retention, Bowen (1986) noted that most research has addressed the effects of work on the family, ignoring the possible reciprocal nature of the relationship. Other research has acknowledged that work-family conflicts and family stress can affect job performance (Statuto, 1984), family adaptation and well-being (Lavee, McCubbin & Patterson, 1985; McCubbin & Lavee, 1986), and retention decisions (Grace & Steiner, 1978; Jones & Butler, 1980, Szoc, 1982). The most consistent findings regarding the family-retention relationship is the positive relationship between spouse opinion and the member's decision to reenlist. When the spouse is supportive of the member's remaining in the military, reenlistment is more likely than if the spouse is not supportive (Bowen, 1986; Lund, 1978; Szoc, 1982; Van Vranken, Jellen, Knudsen, Marlowe & Segal, 1984).

In recent research aimed at identifying the predictors of spouse support for enlisted males' Air Force careers, Pittman and Orthner (1988) found that the only two factors with direct positive effects on spouse support were satisfaction with life in the organization (person-life style fit) and length of association with the military. Marital and personal adjustment and perceptions of the local community environment influenced spouse support positively and indirectly through their satisfaction with the organization. Other demographic measures (i.e., respondent age, length of marriage, officer-enlisted, educational level, employment status, number of children, and race) were not significant. The findings suggest that wives may be supportive of husband's careers even if their marital and personal adjustment is low, as long as they are satisfied with the life style provided by the military.

The reciprocal nature of the decision-making process is emphasized by research that has found that spouse's attitude toward the soldier's staying or leaving to be influenced to some extent by the soldier's attitude toward staying or leaving (Lund, 1978; Szoc, 1982). Thus, whether the spouse is supportive of the soldier's reenlistment or making the Army a career may, in some instances depend on whether the soldier is satisfied with the Army and positive about remaining. A survey of personnel at Fort Benning, Georgia, found that spouse support was the most important contributor to career commitment among enlisted soldiers and company grade officers—significantly higher than pay and job security (Orthner, Brody, Hill, Pais, Orthner, & Covi, 1985). Also, the spouse career commitment relationship appears to be reciprocal: spouses take members' satisfaction and career intent into account in forming their own opinions (Hunter, 1982; Lund, 1978; Szoc, 1982). Further, spouses of officers appear to be more supportive of members remaining in the military than spouses of enlisted personnel (Grace and Steiner, 1978; Van Vranken, et al., 1984).

Bowen (1986), evaluating job morale, satisfaction with Air Force life, and spouse support for career, found that spouse support and satisfaction with Air Force life were the strongest predictors of retention intentions for enlisted males and male officers. For enlisted women, spouse support and job morale were the strongest predictors. Spouse support had an indirect effect on retention intentions of enlisted men only, through increasing their satisfaction with Air Force life. For enlisted men and male officers, the wife's perceptions of the Air Force as a place to raise children was a significant predictor of spouse support. For enlisted men, three other variables were also significant of spouse support: date of husband's entry into the service, number of hours husband worked per week, and the wife's parent-child relationship satisfaction. For enlisted women, the strongest predictor of spouse support was husband's positive feelings about pursuing an Air Force career (97% of females in the sample were dual military). Three other significant predictors were, in decreasing order of importance: husband's sex-role attitudes, husband's satisfaction with parent-child relationship, and the amount of time the wife's career caused her to be away from home overnight. Spouse support for female members' careers appears to depend more on spouse's sex role attitudes than does spouse support for male members' careers.

Spouse Support: Research Issues

Although research has established that spouse support plays a critical role in the retention decisions of some members, there remain many unanswered questions. Chief among these questions are: 1) what are the variables that influence spouse support; 2) what is the process by which spouse support operates to influence the retention decision; 3) what factors affect the direction and magnitude of the support; and 4) how does spouse opinion operate--does the spouse influence the soldier or does the soldier's attitudes determine the spouse's attitudes.

Some existing evidence indicates that variables such as satisfaction with the military as an environment for children and families, degree of person-Army lifestyle fit and the wife's parent-child relationship are influential. Also, certain demographic variables such as length of time associated with the military and number of hours husband works per week are associated strongly with spouse opinion. Lacking is a thorough examination of other factors that may influence spouse support. Evidence from recent small group discussions with selected Army spouses suggests a variety of factors that may influence whether spouses are supportive of soldiers' careers. These include: whether the spouse comes from a military family, degree of need for security, level of risk tolerance, attractiveness and perceived availability of civilian alternatives, and perceived supportiveness of the military community. Further, it is not clear to what extent spouses' opinions are influenced by members' attitudes about the military and about staying or leaving. These and other variables need to be identified and tested for possible links to spouse support.

Clearly, all spouses do not influence members' retention decisions; yet research has not identified the conditions under which spouses can or will exercise influence. Family power relationships, interaction patterns, and

traditionality of sex role attitudes may determine whether the spouse's opinion is influential.

Although research indicates that spouse opinion may be slightly less influential for officers than for enlisted soldiers (Bowen, 1986), it has not been determined whether spouse influence varies by member pay grade, term of service, spouse's employment status, size of income, or stage in the family life cycle. These issues require systematic testing and comparison with other factors such as pay, bonuses, and benefits, to determine the importance of spouse opinion relative to other variables.

Finally, the mechanism by which spouses influence members' career and reenlistment decisions has not been identified through research. For the Army to be able to affect the retention decision, it is critical to be able to describe the decisionmaking process, the place of spouse opinion relative to other variables in the "retention equation," and factors which affect the magnitude and direction of spouse influence.

Travel, Relocation, and Separation: Research Findings

It is through deployment and Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves that the military makes its presence felt most dramatically. There is much research on the location-relocation issue, but there is disagreement as to whether the mobility issue affects retention positively or negatively (Woelfel & Savell, 1978). Some members view relocation and Temporary Duty Assignments (TDY) positively, not surprising in view of the fact that some recruits list the opportunity to travel as a primary reason for initial enlistment (Pliske, Elig, & Johnson, 1986).

For others, moves and family separations are disruptive. As noted earlier, female members' overnight absences from their families appear to be more strongly associated with decreased spouse support than are male members' absences (Bowen, 1986). In a research effort using satisfaction with military life as a major outcome variable, male Army officers reported that their wives viewed family separation, housing, and frequency of moves as the major sources of their dissatisfaction with the military (Lund, 1978). Marsh (1976) surveyed 205 Army families who had experienced a move and found that the following factors were able to explain 55% of the variation in a measure of "family hardship": 1) amount of time family waited for permanent housing; 2) age of first child; 3) distance moved; 4) unforeseen travel costs; 5) attitude toward relocating to post; 6) familiarity with post prior to arrival; 7) damage to household goods; 8) amount of money borrowed to cover costs, and 9) number of children. Although senior NCOs reported more dissatisfaction with current location and reported being separated from their families more frequently and for longer periods than middle grade (E5-E6) NCOs, E6s had higher (worse) scores on the Family Hardship Scale used. Clearly, moving can create a multitude of difficulties. Families incur financial costs as well as the social and emotional costs of the disruption of social support networks and the disruption of children's schooling.

In a research effort with 143 Air Force NCOs Shaw, Fisher, and Woodman (1983) found the attitude toward the move to the present assignment to be the strongest predictor of intent to reenlist. Other significant variables were total number of career transfers and total number of days on TDY during the past 12 months. As number of career transfers increased, the intent to reenlist decreased. Interestingly, the relationship between number of days on TDY during the past 12 months and reenlistment intent was positive; as number of days on TDY increased, so did intent to reenlist. The authors suggest that a possible reason for the TDY finding is that individuals who are in high TDY jobs are more committed than others who may have self-selected out of high TDY assignments. The three significant predictors of intent to make the Air Force a career were number of career transfers, perceived opportunity for advancement, and the overall match of the present assignment to an ideal. The percent of variation accounted for in intent to reenlist and career intent was 10% and 17%, respectively.

Consistent with the findings from the foregoing research, Lewis (1985) found that neither frequency nor length of TDY was significantly related to career intent for a sample of Air Force officers and enlisted members and spouses. On the other hand, the disruptive effects of deployment and frequent moves, especially for families, is commonly acknowledged in the literature (Decker, 1978; Hunter, 1982; Marsh, 1976). Research on pay and bonuses revealed that extra monetary incentives are needed to offset the negative effects of sea duty on reenlistment (Warner & Goldberg, 1984). The same finding would be expected for married members on unaccompanied overseas tours, although this conclusion is, at present, without empirical support.

Travel, Relocation, and Separation: Research Issues

The effect of relocation and family separation on retention appears to depend on individuals' and families' ability to cope with the circumstances military created by military mobility requirements rather than solely on the absolute qualities of relocation and separation. Some members and families view travel and relocation as a positive aspect of the military lifestyle while others find it stressful.

Research on the effects of the military's mobility requirements on the reenlistment decision have two major methodological requirements on the generalizability of findings. First, some research efforts used "satisfaction" and "hardship" rather than reenlistment as outcomes. Secondly, many of the investigations used non-Army families. With one exception, the investigations tended to measure travel, relocation, and separation effects as global measures. More useful to the Army would be measuring the relationship of the retention decision to attitudes toward relevant aspects of travel, relocation and separation. Data collected recently from small group discussions with Army families suggest that it is not merely that the deployments, alerts, and relocations are unsatisfactory in themselves; it is the lack of sufficient notice or apparent lack of a reasonable justification for the particular activity or move. Research is needed to identify the aspects of Army mobility requirements that affect the level of influence these features of military life have on the retention of different Army subgroups.

Another weakness in the research is the use of members to report spouse's attitudes. The level of correspondence between members' and spouses' attitudes may be too low to constitute a valid measure of spouse attitudes. Future research should obtain information from spouses directly, especially attitudinal information.

Location: Research Findings

In a review of the military literature on location, Boesel and Johnson (1984) conclude that the issue of separation and relocation looms larger than location in their effects on retention decisions. On the other hand, Hiller (1982) found "guaranteed location" to be equivalent to a 33% reenlistment bonus in its effect on second term reenlistment across all four active services. The appeal of location of choice created highest reenlistment rates in the Marine Corps, followed by the Navy, Air Force, and Army, respectively; it declined as a reenlistment incentive across services as years of service increased.

Overseas locations are potentially the most stress-producing and unsatisfactory due to the unfamiliar culture and isolation from social support systems. Further, in overseas locations where the cost of living is high satisfaction levels may be low (Croan, Janofsky, & Orthner, 1987). A May 1983 survey of married, accompanied family members in Europe (Ozkaptan, Sanders, & Holz, 1986) revealed that most members and spouses were satisfied with Army family life, with about twice as many officers as enlisted members reporting satisfaction. Wives of both enlisted men and officers reported greater satisfaction than their husbands. Similarly, more than twice as many officers' families as enlisted reported being satisfied with Army life. As rank increased, the number responding that they would voluntarily extend their overseas tour increased. Those in the lower enlisted ranks tended to report that they would require an incentive to extend. "Family reasons" were more often reported by officer families as reasons why they would not extend their tours while enlisted and NCO families listed "job reasons."

Location: Research Issues

The foregoing suggests that location effects operate selectively by rank and may affect members and spouses differently. From these efforts, it is not clear whether there is an effect of the location itself, the relocation process or the process by which the location assignment is made. A multivariate research effort using Navy line officers which is reviewed by Boesel and Johnson (1984) found that satisfaction with present assignment was a function of the assignments themselves and the process by which the assignments were made (Arima, 1981). These factors, in turn, may be influenced by the housing available and, in combination, influence satisfaction and retention decisions.

Housing: Research Findings

Although housing has not been linked directly to turnover and retention decisions in the literature, it has been mentioned as a major source of dissatisfaction with the relocation process and particularly overseas assignments (Marsh, 1976; Lawson, Molof, Magnusson & Davenport, 1984).

Analysis of 1984 Army Exit Survey data revealed that government housing quality was a complaint among those who left early in their careers (Boesel & Johnson, 1984). Complaints concern insufficient Army housing costs allowances, long waits for permanent housing and housing size insufficient for family size. Marsh (1976) found that one of the most important contributors to a measure of family hardship was lack of adequate housing. This was especially true for enlisted members and non-senior NCOs since housing was assigned by rank.

Another housing issue is whether it is on-post or off-post. Both may have advantages and disadvantages depending on the allowances for off-post housing, the positive and negative features of the respective civilian and military communities, and the availability of public and/or private transportation. Two investigations emphasize the negative features of off-post living. McKain (1976) found that families who lived on-post identified more strongly with the Army and had fewer problems than those who lived off-post. Likewise, an evaluation of Army family programs revealed that regardless of rank, those who lived off-post felt more socially isolated from the Army and were less likely to use Army services when in need (Croan, et al., 1987). Since higher ranking members and families are more likely to live on-post, rank and its associated income effects may potentially confound these findings. However Croan, et al. found that the negative effects of living off-post persisted without regard to rank. Also, as McKain (1976) concluded, housing location effects are probably mediated by families' coping resources.

Housing: Research Issues

Although satisfaction with housing has not been linked directly to retention, there is reason to suspect an indirect influence on retention through spouse, family and member satisfaction with military life. Its effect may vary by rank (and age and years of service because they are probable correlates of rank) since housing assignments occur on a priority basis by rank. Further, expenses incurred as a result of housing assignment delays created more potential out-of-pocket expenses and therefore more hardship for those in the lower ranks (who receive lower pay) than those in the higher ranks. Finally, potential negative effects of housing may be mediated by individual and family coping mechanisms, an issue which has not been addressed in retention research.

Community Programs and Participation: Research Findings

Martin (1979), in one of the few tests of the influence of community participation, found that this variable was not significantly related to job satisfaction or retention intentions. The research effort employed a sample of civilian employees (no spouses) whose gender was not stated. However, Pittman and Orthner (1988) found that for families in general and military families in particular, ties to the base and surrounding community may influence satisfaction with military life which, in turn, may influence spouse support and retention decisions.

The community provides a support network of neighbors and friends that may mitigate stress. Further, the community contains civilian and military program resources that may be useful to the member and the family. In a research

investigation of Army families separated by the husband's deployment, Montalvo (1976) found that military families sought help from other military families more often than civilian families sought help from each other. This tendency was positively associated with the husband's commitment to a military career. A research investigation of Air Force families, however, did not support the notion of a cohesive military community with neighboring relationships (Orthner, 1980). Interestingly, the investigations of community involvement with military samples concentrated on spouses rather than members, so information concerning member-community relationships is sparse.

Preceding the question of whether programs and community resources affect retention is the question of the degree to which families use programs and resources and, ultimately, awareness that particular programs and resources exist. In fact, awareness of the existence of programs may be sufficient to foster spouses' positive regard for the military regardless of whether they actually use the programs (Orthner, Pittman & Janofsky, 1985). Program awareness and use may also vary by family demographic characteristics. In a survey of 655 career Army families, Spellman (1976) found that education, rank and gender were the variables that most clearly differentiated survey respondents in their awareness of available community resources and the perceived "social costs" of using the resources. Those with lower education and rank were less aware of community resources and were likely to believe that their careers would suffer if it were known that they used resources such as marriage counseling. They were also more likely to name resources such as the Red Cross and the clergy rather professional and clinical resources when asked to list the resources they were aware of in the community. Also, females were more likely than males to be aware of a broader range of resources and to have a more positive attitude toward their use.

Current evidence suggests that community programs produce an indirect effect on retention through their effect on other variables. The actual direct impact of installation and community programs on retention behavior questionable. In an evaluation of "human service" programs at five installations, Nogami, Bowen and Merrin (1986) found little relationship between unit attrition and use of post agencies by company commanders for referral. Further, some soldiers viewed program referral as a step in the progression toward discharge and tended to value the programs negatively. There was also variation in program quality across installations, a finding supported by an evaluation of Army family programs (Croan, et al., 1987). Likewise, research using retention models to estimate the effects of Air Force family programs on retention found no relationship between the presence of base family support centers and actual retention for enlisted personnel. Interestingly, the relationship was negative for officers (Systems Research and Applications, 1987a). A similar research effort was able to show only weak evidence of a link between retention and morale, welfare and recreation program satisfaction (Systems Research and Applications, 1987b). These findings suggest that either community programs influence retention indirectly or that a program variable other than level of satisfaction with programs may be more strongly linked to retention.

Community Programs and Participation: Research Issues

Few research efforts have addressed the effect of community and Army programs on retention. Those that do often use a single item measuring overall satisfaction with all programs in a general sense rather than specific programs. Such information provides decision-makers with no guidance about where to allocate resources. Needed are data on individual program awareness, use, satisfaction, willingness to use if needed, quality and impact. Such research could add to this little-studied area information about the impact of specific programs on retention, and for which groups programs are apt to be most effective in improving retention.

Marital Satisfaction: Research Findings

Research on the relationship between marital satisfaction and retention is inconclusive. Woelfel and Savell (1978) found no significant impact of marital satisfaction on job satisfaction or retention intentions in a sample of male and female Army officers and enlisted members. However, Szoc (1982), using a sample of 5,028 officers and enlisted Navy personnel, found that marital satisfaction had an indirect effect on retention intentions through its effect on family/Navy satisfaction. Likewise, as stated earlier, Pittman and Orthner (1987) hypothesize an indirect effect on retention as a result of their finding that marital satisfaction exerts an indirect effect on spouse support through its effect on satisfaction with the military environment.

Marital Satisfaction: Research Issues

As with other variables such as housing, location, relocation, and separation, the relationship of marital satisfaction to retention should be tested against a comprehensive array of other factors in order to identify their links with marital satisfaction as well as to establish the nature and strength of the relationship between marital satisfaction and retention. Such research will provide more information to the Army about the types of policies and programs which can be designed and implemented to support families and impact positively on marital satisfaction and retention.

Satisfaction with Military Life: Research Findings

When approached from the perspective of the member, satisfaction with military life has been conceptualized as a component of organizational commitment (Royle & Robertson, 1980) and as an independent precursor to retention intentions (Bowen, 1986; Szoc, 1982). Research supports both as predictors of retention intentions. Other researchers have conceptualized satisfaction with military life as a component of family life satisfaction and position it either as a precursor to spouse support (or vice versa) in the chain of events leading to retention decisions. Evidence supports both conceptualizations as explanatory models of retention intentions (Bowen, 1986; Orthner & Pittman, 1986; Pittman & Orthner, 1987). In the Bowen (1986) research, spouse support was a precursor to satisfaction with military life for male and female enlisted Air Force members but not for male officers. In the same research, satisfaction with Air Force life was a precursor to retention intentions for male enlisted members and officers but not for enlisted women.

Satisfaction with military life has also been studied as the attitude of members and/or spouses toward specific aspects of the military, such as pay, relocation, housing, rules and regulations, and dress codes, rather than as a single global measure such as Bowen used. Orthner and Pittman (1986), for example, constructed a variable named "perceived organizational support for families" with three dimensions tapping satisfaction with base programs, view of the base as a good environment for children and size of support network. The organizational support for families variable had nearly twice the direct influence on job commitment as the family support variable consisting of marital satisfaction and spouse support.

Satisfaction with Military Life: Research Issues

Although satisfaction with military life has been found to be strongly related to retention, variations in the manner in which satisfaction with military life has been conceptualized and measured make it difficult to determine its relationship to other variables in the "retention equation." As a global measure, the relationship of satisfaction with military life to intention appears to be affected, at least, by member gender. As a variable with several components, such as satisfaction with the military as an environment for children, housing, relocation, support network, etc., its relationship to retention is less clear.

Spouse Employment: Research Findings

The issue of spouse employment in the military has become increasingly important as the number of married members has increased, the cost of living has risen and traditional sex-role stereotypes about male and female work roles have changed. More members spouses are working because they desire additional expendable family income. Still others work because they have to make ends meet. Still others work for personal and social reasons such as individual growth and development and contacts with other adults (Moore, Spain & Bianchi, 1984; Yogeve, 1983).

The ease with which spouses are able to find employment depends on a variety of factors. Members may be assigned to installations in areas with few on-post or civilian alternatives for the spouse's employment. Early marriage and childbearing often results in spouses' having limited experience, thus restricting options. Interviews with Community and Family Support (CFSC) personnel indicate that the intensity of the problem may vary by location. If the member is assigned to an installation where policies and programs conducive to spouse employment are absent or restrictive, both finding a job and locating suitable child care may present sizeable difficulties. Further, evidence from small group discussions with Army spouses indicates that some civilian communities may be reluctant to hire military spouses because of the stereotype that they are transitory, or because they are viewed as outsiders competing with community members for jobs.

The link between spouse employment and retention is not well-established at present, but there is recent evidence that frequent relocation creates problems in finding suitable employment in a timely fashion and is negatively

associated with spouses' satisfaction with military life (Schwartz, Braddy, Griffith & Wood, 1987). A survey of relocated Army families (Marsh, 1976) indicated that a source of dissatisfaction with the move was the Army's perceived failure to provide general information about opportunities for jobs for wives.

Spouse Employment: Research Issues

Spouse employment may also affect retention through its effect on spouse support. There is some evidence that because the employed spouse has an independent income, she is more self-confident, has more power in the marriage and exerts more influence on family decision making (Nieve, 1985). If this is true, then spouse employment and its attendant issues of child care, scheduling, separation, and relocation may affect retention through at least three avenues: spouse support, marital/family satisfaction and satisfaction with military life (Schwartz, Braddy, Griffith & Wood, 1987). Additional research is needed to assess the viability of these links.

Dual Career/Dual Military: Research Findings

Researchers argue convincingly that spouse employment and dual careers are separate constructs that overlap only in certain areas. Williams (1978) maintains that the situation in which the spouse holds a full- or part-time job in order to provide a second income is a dual worker or spouse employment issue rather than a dual career issue. A dual career family, he argues, is one where both husband and wife are committed to a career. For the dual career couple, the issue is further partitioned by whether the spouse has a civilian or a military career and, ultimately, what effect both have on retention. A research investigation of Navy junior officers and spouses revealed that employed wives were less supportive of their husband's career than those who worked inside the home. Further, wives who were teachers or Navy officers were less positive about their husband's remaining in the Navy than wives employed in other jobs (Mohr, Holzbach & Morrison, 1981).

The spouse employed in a non-military career position may experience some of the same problems in securing employment after relocation and in managing work-family conflicts as the spouse who works intermittently or the spouse who works only to supplement the family income. Dual military couples face a unique set of problems, however, problems that may lead to decreased retention among dual military members compared to members married to civilian spouses. The military is not able to guarantee that the couple will always be assigned to the same location and the work hours for each may be long and inconvenient for maintaining a viable marital and family relationship. Traditionally in the military, officer's spouses have a social role responsibility in military protocol. The wife in a dual military couple may not be able to perform that role and still progress in her career. Child care becomes problematic since the wife who has traditionally filled the child care role may not be available consistently. When both members have concurrent field duty, the child care issue becomes even more critical. In exploratory research of Air Force dual military couples, Williams (1978) found that most couples had decided not to have children and were adamant about their decision.

There is some evidence that female members' role conflict may lead to lowered reenlistment intentions. Orthner, Pittman and Janofsky (1985) analyzed survey data from an eight-installation Air Force sample and found a direct relationship between marital quality and work commitment for female members. For male members, marital quality influenced work commitment through family adjustment. Female members also reported significantly lower levels of marital quality and significantly less spouse support than male members.

When family and work responsibilities cannot be carried out satisfactorily in a dual military marriage, it is typically the female member who leaves the military (Tice, 1986). However male members of dual military couples may also have lowered retention rates. Analysis of a subset of data from a February 1983 survey of Army personnel revealed that dual military men had higher retention intentions than singles but lower than other married males (Raiha, 1986). Dual military females had lower intentions than either single females or females married to non-military spouses. This research also found that dual military couples' ties to community support networks are apt to be weak because of long work hours. Job contacts may be the couple's major support network.

Dual Career/Dual Military: Research Issues

Dual career and dual military couples experience unique stresses as they attempt to balance household, family and job responsibilities. For dual military couples, the work-family role conflict is particularly intense. Child care must be arranged to accommodate both a "normal" workday, which may begin at 5:00 to 6:00 a.m., and those situations where both parents are deployed or have concurrent field duty. For couples not assigned to the same location, the strain of separation may affect marital quality, satisfaction with military life and, ultimately, retention. The Army may have great difficulty retaining this group. Given the investment in recruiting and training costs, research should be directed to a thorough investigation of the stresses and challenges this group faces and the effects of dual military status on job performance and retention. Findings should inform decisions at the policy and program levels about strategies to support this group and to positively influence performance and retention.

Career and Family Life Cycle: Research Findings

The notion that individuals move through a series of stages in their career development and family life is well-accepted and supported by research. However, there is less agreement about the specific nature of these stages and their accompanying characteristics, stresses and challenges (Mattessich & Hill, 1985). The assumption underlying the life and career stages notion is that individuals progress in a linear fashion from early, middle, and late family life and career development with varying demands, stresses, needs and satisfactions associated with each stage.

The concepts of family life cycle or life course are frequently used to refer to the stages through which families pass over the life span. Although different school of thought offer various perspectives about the nature of these family transition stages, a commonly used typology defines the stages in terms of "critical events" such as marriage, birth of children, children

leaving home, empty nest, and dissolution of marriage through death and divorce (Glick, 1977). Mattessich and Hill (1985) describe a familiar seven-stage model with stages marked by changes in family size, ages of family members and employment status of breadwinner(s):

1. newly established, childless couples;
2. childbearing families with infants and preschool children;
3. families with one or more children of school age;
4. families with one or more adolescents;
5. families with one or more children over age 18;
6. families in the middle years, children departed from the household;
7. parents retired.

With respect to the job/career stages notion, Raelin (1985) has proposed three descriptive labels for early, middle and late career: "digging in, finding a niche and entrenched," each associated with different time demands, reactions to supervisory authority, satisfaction and levels of commitment. In another investigation of life cycle effects, older, later career individuals reported less vocational, psychological, physical and interpersonal strain and used more recreational, self-care and rational cognitive coping resources than younger individuals. Interestingly, there was no difference by age in the use of social support as a coping strategy (Osipow, Doty, & Spokane, 1985). These investigations typically were based on samples of white, affluent civilians, usually males. The applicability to minorities, lower income individuals and the military remains to be tested.

The career-family life cycle and attendant demands may affect retention through avenues such as pay and retirement benefits, deployment and separation, working hours, job satisfaction, commitment and marital satisfaction. Recent research has emphasized the need to integrate the notions of career and family life cycles in order to gain a better understanding of the factors that affect retention behavior in the military (Bowen, 1986). Newly married couples without children likely have more time available for work and experience less work-family conflict than couples with young children. Families with preschool children are apt to experience the greatest demands on their time and the greatest work-family conflict (Beutell & Greenhaus, 1980; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Kepelman, 1981; Fleck, Staines, & Lang, 1980). Further, Nieva (1985) noted that the cyclical properties of work and family have different occupational consequences for males and females, particularly in families where the wife is expected to assume the traditional role of child and home caretaker. It is usually the female who makes the major adjustments when work and family demands conflict. As mentioned earlier, preliminary findings from the Army officers reported by Raiha (1986) indicate that when dual military couples are unable to successfully resolve the multiple role conflicts of employee, spouse, and parent, the result is lower retention intentions for the female (Tice, 1986). Even for couples with a non-working spouse, cycle-

related work-family conflicts may affect spouse attitudes and member retention may be affected as well.

Career and Family Life Cycle: Research Issues

Although the notion of career and family life cycle stages have been well-researched and documented, little is known about their impacts on retention. Further, most research has focused on the "modal family," with two parents who have children and move through careers in an orderly, sequential fashion. Further research should concentrate on the development of typologies which capture "nontraditional" family constellations and work patterns, such as single parent households, reconstituted families and career changes. Effort should also continue on the discovery of the link between family and career stages and variations in that interaction over the life span. Research addressing this time-dependent element should inform Army decision-makers about the kinds of programs and policies that can be implemented for particular Army families at particular stages in the family life cycle and soldier career cycle.

Multivariate Models of Family Factor Effects on Retention

The research presented provides a rich source of information about factors that influence retention. However, most of the foregoing research examines the effects on retention of one or, at most, three or four variables. Such research ignores other potentially important variables and fails to take into account the complexity of influences on the retention decision. Results from such two-variable, correlational investigations are often misleading and fail to provide policy-makers and planners with useful information about strategies to influence retention.

Several recent research efforts have developed and tested more complex models of the military-family relationship. The challenge in such efforts is to identify the relevant variables in the relationship and develop satisfactory measures of them. Generalizations across these research efforts are difficult to develop because constructs are measured differently, including dependent variables. Still, such efforts are valuable because they can incorporate many variables and provide more powerful explanations of complex relationships.

Family Factor Effects: Research Findings

In the retention research effort discussed earlier, Bowen (1986) developed a model which examined the affects of job morale, spouse support and satisfaction with Air Force life on retention intentions. The model accounted for 56% of the variance in retention intentions for male officers, 35% of the variance for enlisted males and 46% for enlisted women. A positive, direct relationship between job morale and retention intentions was found for enlisted women only. Spouse support directly affected retention for all three groups, while it also had indirect effects for enlisted men through effects on satisfaction with Air Force life.

Woelfel and Savell (1978) investigated the effects of background and family factors, Army experience, job satisfaction and marital satisfaction on retention intentions. The authors were able to eliminate PCS moves and mandatory social events from the model because of non-significance. The following five variables exhibited significant, positive, direct effects on retention intentions and together accounted for 41% of the variance in retention intentions: job satisfaction, sex, years married (spurious because of a correlation with years served), knowledge of duty hours and number of hours worked. For the marital satisfaction variable, member perceptions were used as a proxy for spouse responses. The authors explained the positive relationship between number of hours worked and retention intentions as a reflection of the greater organizational commitment of members who work long hours.

Recently, Orthner and Pittman (1984; 1986) investigated the effects of positive program exposure, organizational support and family support on job commitment, one component of the latter being intent to pursue an Air Force Career (in addition to job morale and perceived quality of job performance). Family support and organizational support influenced job commitment directly and positive program exposure produced indirect effects. The research highlights the impact of family variables on job commitment and the indirect influence of organizational programs on job commitment through their effect on perceived organizational support and family support (Orthner & Pittman, 1986).

Another perspective that has guided research on the family-military contributions to retention decisions is based on the belief that the military creates competition between work and family to which all family members respond. This competition is felt as "stress," "role strain" or "role conflict" by the member. The success with which the member and family are able to resolve this organizationally-induced family-work competition will presumably affect the decision to reenlist. One way researchers have approached this issue is to evaluate the family under conditions of extreme stress or role conflict. For the military family, deployment and family relocation create circumstances that test families' ability to adapt. To the degree that frequent deployment and relocation are MOS-specific, the findings from these investigations will be more or less relevant depending on the member's job.

Deployment perhaps creates the greatest potential work-family role conflict. The member is forced to relinquish the family role for an extended period of time and then reestablish it upon returning. Jones and Butler (1980) investigated the effects of general job characteristics, job-related conflict measures, leader and peer support, and role incompatibility on intent to reenlist, satisfaction with the Navy, job satisfaction and job involvement using survey data from 181 married Navy enlistees. Survey measures were taken twice—once at the beginning of deployment and again near the end. Role incompatibility was the single best predictor of intent to reenlist both at the beginning and at the end of deployment. When added to the other three independent variable measures, it increased the prediction of intent to reenlist and satisfaction with the Navy each by 8%. Interestingly, role incompatibility was not strongly related to job satisfaction and added no explained variance over the remaining three independent variables. It appears

that job and career are distinct constructs for military personnel and that family-work role conflict may affect career attitudes more than job satisfaction. This research also underscores the importance of recognizing the dynamic quality of the decision process. At early deployment, role incompatibility added 10% to the prediction of intent to reenlist; at the end of deployment, it added 8%. Perhaps, as the authors conclude, "...job characteristics and events continue to be experienced on a daily basis" and "...responses reflect events more temporally relevant and psychologically salient." (p.375)

Two recent investigations approached the family-work relationship as an issue best understood from the perspective of how the family adapts to the stresses produced by military life. Lavee, McCubbin and Patterson (1985) surveyed 1,227 Army officers and enlisted members and spouses stationed in West Germany--about half on their first European tour. The variables measured were: (1) social support (made up of community support and friendship support); (2) family life events (a measure of major life stress events); (3) family system resources (comprised of supportive communication, family cohesion and family adaptability); (4) coherence (a composite of predictability of family schedules and environment; commitment to Army mission and lifestyle; controllability of and ability to plan for future military assignments; and Army-family fit (the degree to which families feel cared for and treated fairly by the Army); and (5) relocation strains. The dependent measure, adaptation, was a composite of general well-being, family life/Army life satisfaction and family distress. Relocation, coherence and social support were most strongly related to adaptation, although family life events and family system resources were also statistically significant. Family resources, relocation and coherence had direct effects on adaptation, while social support affected adaptation indirectly through coherence. Relocation also had an indirect effect on coherence. Research results indicate that families' ability to adapt is influenced by the build-up of past stresses and the addition of current stresses, buffered by family resources and social support. External sources such as stress-producing events and social support affect adaptation more strongly than internal, family system resources. The authors suggest that future research with the model include personal resources and coping strategies.

One weakness in the above efforts is their failure to explore life cycle effects on adaptation. McCubbin and Lavee (1986) partitioned the soldier and spouse sample used in the Lavee, et al. (1985) research into the following four groups based on their stage in the family life cycle: couples (no children); families with pre-school and school-age children; families with adolescents and launching young adults; and "empty nest." As in the Lavee, et al. (1985) research, the dependent measure was family adaptation. Couples without children were least likely to report that they received command sponsorship support and spouses in this group had the lowest sense of cohesion. Families at the pre-school and school age stage had the greatest needs and the fewest resources. They had the greatest amount of post-arrival strain, the greatest number of spouses employed, the fewest individual coping resources, the fewest perceived community services and community and neighbor resources. Members in this group also had the lowest sense of coherence. The measures of stress, strengths, coherence and community supports explained from 31% to 37% of the

variance in family adaptation for each family life cycle stage. The authors emphasized the need for the Army to use a life cycle perspective in developing programs for Army families.

Family Factor Effects: Research Issues

These multivariate investigations represent an important methodological advance in the research on family factor effects on retention and are important steps toward a more in-depth understanding of the family-retention relationship. Still, lack of consistent variable specification across research efforts and restricted non-Army samples make generalizations difficult. Further, the investigations continue to address a limited number of variables, without always providing clear justification for the inclusion of certain variables.

The Lavee, et al. (1985) and McCubbin, et al. (1986) models are relevant to retention decisions to the extent that family adaptation influences retention. Although conventional wisdom and previous research makes a case for the adaptation-retention link, retention was not measured in these two efforts. These two efforts also used samples of military members and families undergoing the stress of relocation and adapting to a foreign culture. The relevance of such an adaptation model to CONUS military families is not known and must be established by future research.

Findings from this research indicate that many family factors affect retention but they do little more than suggest tentative links among these factors and between these factors and retention. There is much to be learned in order to provide Army leadership with the kind of information that will inform decisionmaking and resource allocation for family policy implementation and program development.

Research and Policy Questions

The following research questions are suggested by gaps in the current state of knowledge of family factor impacts on retention. These questions are tied to key policy questions that Army leadership has asked of the AFRP.

Research Questions:

1. What family factors impact on retention?
2. What is the relative impact of family and non-family factors on the retention decision? How does the relative importance of these factors vary for different subgroups of soldiers and families?
3. How is the family involved in making retention decisions?
4. How do Army and family policies, programs and practices affect retention decisions?

Policy Questions:

1. How can the Army positively influence the retention decisions of soldiers and families in support of overall force management policy?
2. What kind of programs and policies are needed to enhance retention?

Research Directions

A critical need in retention research is for a program of research rather than piecemeal efforts, one that incorporates variables in a design that can demonstrate which factors are influential for particular types of soldiers and families at particular stages in the family life cycle/soldier career cycle. Such a design would supply information presently lacking about how these factors interact with each other to produce their effects on retention, a major contribution to the state of current knowledge about family impacts on retention. Such information would enable the Army to influence the retention of certain groups of soldiers by designing and targeting (by category of MOS, stage of the family life-cycle, term of service, etc.) particular programs and policies that impact upon the factors that uniquely affect the retention of these groups.

A second major research issue suggested by the literature is the need for more thoughtful definition and measurement of variables. The investigations often employ many definitions of variables such as satisfaction with the Military environment, job satisfaction, morale and organizational commitment, making it difficult to determine their relationship to family factors and retention. Even retention, the outcome variable, has been defined variously as reenlistment intention, intention to make the military a career, stay-leave behavior and attrition, a practice which limits the generalizability of findings. Further, satisfaction with community programs typically has been measured as one global satisfaction item rather than measuring the awareness, use, satisfaction, benefits and impacts of a variety of separate programs. Research is needed to establish the key dimensions of these constructs in order to clarify the exact nature of the relationships between family factors and retention.

Finally, retention research has focused on identifying and measuring the factors that affect retention rather than investigating how families actually make retention decisions. That is, researchers have generally approached the research on retention as stay-leave behavior which is influenced by "factors" such as pay, benefits, location, job satisfaction, etc. The assumption is that certain factors found to be important influences can be manipulated in a way that cause soldiers to remain associated with the military. Such information does not provide an understanding of the decision making process. A critical missing step in the understanding of retention decision making is that of identifying the mechanism by which soldiers and families incorporate the tangible (pay, benefits, bonuses) and intangible (satisfaction, positive/negative affect) factors, apply influence tactics, and implement a strategy to produce a retention decision. It is by understanding this decision process that the Army may be able to influence retention at the individual

family level, for families that may not be affected by more global, broad-based strategies such as reenlistment bonuses.

To date, no one has studied this process aspect of retention decisionmaking. For example, spouse opinion has been found to have a powerful effect on retention, yet research has not addressed the mechanism by which spouse support operates relative to other factors in the retention decision. Clearly, not all spouses influence retention decisionmaking. Under what conditions and for what couples does that influence occur? How do soldiers and spouses influence each other? What controls the magnitude of the influence? To what degree is spouse opinion influenced by his/her perception of the soldier's satisfaction and intention to reenlist or make the Army a career? In order to influence the decision, it is important to know: 1) what information members and families use in making the decision; 2) how the information is combined to arrive at a decision; 3) who is involved in the decision and the magnitude of their influence; 4) the tactics couples use to influence each other; 5) the decision strategies used; 6) the timing of the decision; and 7) the relative stability of the decision over time. By learning how the retention decision making process works for various subgroups, useful information can be provided to the Army about targeting cost-effective strategies for influencing the decision.

Planned Approach and Expected Outcomes

The AFRP is planning and designing several investigations and activities to address these research and policy questions. A large-scale survey is being designed to capture an array of factors and some process features associated with the retention decision. The questionnaire will be administered to a probability sample of soldiers and spouses selected to represent key variables that research has demonstrated to be tied to retention (term of enlistment, rank/pay grade, time remaining to ETS).

Survey results will be used to develop a model of retention which will provide information about the relative contributions of family and non-family factors to retention for key Army subgroups at various points in the family life-cycle/soldier career cycle. Findings from this survey will be useful to Army leadership and decision-makers such as CPSC, the Chief of Staff, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and MACOMs in developing programs and policies to affect the retention of several key Army subgroups.

An in-depth investigation is planned to capture information about how the retention decision making process operates. Only knowing the factors that affect retention provides no information about how members, spouses and families actually arrive at a reenlistment or career decision. Such information will be useful to Reenlistment NCOs and First Sergeants in reenlistment counseling, and to TRADOC schools, Commanders, and MACOMs in the education and training of Reenlistment NCOs.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed shows a consistent relationship between spouse support for the military career and both career intent and actual retention

behavior. The more positive and supportive the spouse is about the soldier remaining in the military, the greater the likelihood of remaining. The soldier's satisfaction with the military as a good place to raise a family, his/her degree of organizational commitment, and the soldier's satisfaction with military life is also related to retention. Awareness of the existence of community programs increases satisfaction with military life and enhances retention. The relationship between retention and satisfaction with specific family programs, policies, and other aspects of military life is less clear. The literature reviewed indicates that little is known about the process that is used by families to make actual retention decisions. Such information should be useful to policy makers and program managers who would like to influence that decision to the benefit of the Army. This review of the literature also reveals a need for multivariate and other more sophisticated research designs for testing the relative influence of key family variables in the stay-leave decision.

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